

Standards, Knowledge & Insight Leading to Success (SKILS)

Training Annotated Agenda

SKILS 163

SKILS 163 is the third session in-person core training that front line workers receive within their first year of hire with the Office of Children’s Services (OCS). Workers attend week one in Anchorage. Workers who have attended SKILS 162 training and have been in the field carrying a case load are required to participate in SKILS 163. Their time in the field is an important foundation that SKILS 163 builds upon with specialized topics such as Grief, Separation and Loss; Continuous Quality Improvement; Child Welfare Ethics and Advocacy. The required second week of 163 (to combine to make 6 weeks of core training for all new PSS), is completed in the regional OCS office.

Week 1

Day 1:

Reflections from the Field

This first day starts with an in-depth review of the Practice Model as it pertains to Initial Assessment and Family Services casework activities. OCS Essential Services are reviewed and emphasized. In groups, components of caseworker visits are discussed to reinforce the important activities workers do before, during, and after visits with children, parents, and resource families. Next, workers practice having difficult conversations and share approaches that they have found helpful from their time in the field. Workers explore critical thinking skills and how these enhance their ability to work with families. Workers discover and recognize confirmation bias and how this fits in with their ability to critically think. The day ends with a panel of parents who are currently going through, or who have recently been through, the child welfare system and are willing to offer their perspective to workers in a motivational way

Day 2:

Cultural Humility

The first part of the day, workers define culture, cultural humility and learn how better to engage with families from diverse cultural backgrounds while broadening ones’ perspective regarding ones’ own culture. Participants explore and integrate culturally relevant services and strategies into case planning while taking into account microaggressions and how to respond in a culturally humble way. A Healing Centered Approach, a strength-based approach to trauma that is “culturally grounded and views healing as a restoration of identity”, is discussed. The conclusion of the morning sets a stage for the afternoon with a focus on the connection to culture and traditional ways of life for Alaska Native and American Indian families as a way of enhancing Protective Factors in a culturally relevant way.

Historical Trauma

The focus for the second half of the day is on Alaska's Indigenous Peoples, highlighting resilience while exploring historical trauma and its effects on maintaining mental, physical, emotional, spiritual and relational health. Workers go through an experiential exercise called the “Blanket Exercise” that was

adapted for Alaska by the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium and the Alaska Center for Resource Families. Originally developed by KAIROS of Canada to foster reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people of Canada, the purpose is to increase awareness of historical events as well as the strengths of Alaska Native people in an effort to recognize and reconcile the impacts of historical trauma. As part of the Blanket Exercise curriculum, participants engage in a Talking Circle.

Day 3:

Child Welfare Ethics and Advocacy

Workers review and apply NASW ethical principles alongside the NASW Standards for Social Work Practice in Child Welfare. Participants have an opportunity to assess development and competence with the Standards and identify action steps to further their development. Workers differentiate between different types of ethical problems: value-based, policy or both. Different types of ethical reasoning are covered (deontological, utilitarian, ethics of care) and workers employ various methods to resolve ethical dilemmas in OCS casework using the NASW guidelines. The concept of trauma mastery is visited briefly, with the specific purpose of exploring its role in professional boundaries and appropriate self-disclosure. Participants explore the role of advocacy and assess underlying values and beliefs related to this role.

Casework with Children and Youth: Vulnerable Populations

This afternoon begins with a word about person-first language and assuming competency. Expressive and receptive communication is addressed with the goal of enhanced safety and vulnerability assessments and identification of maltreatment. Workers learn how to create a communication passport that can follow a child and assist providers, caseworkers and educators in meeting their needs. Learners gain an introductory understanding of physical, intellectual and developmental disabilities, including visual and auditory differences, FASD, mobility and cognitive differences. They explore the child protection worker's roles and responsibilities with this population, including specific assessment and documentation strategies, developmental screenings and advocacy for public assistance benefits.

The afternoon includes a segment on best practices with LGBTQ+ youth, highlighting emerging data and practice guidelines from the Child Welfare League of America with Lambda Legal.

The day rounds out with two activities. First, participants hone their caseworker skills by rolling up their sleeves and locating actual resources online for future use. Next, they are given case studies for which they develop specialized child case plans using current ORCA forms. Case plans are presented to the class for feedback.

Day 4:

Quality Assurance

This day is spent learning about the state and federal structures designed to improve and enhance casework practice- Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and Quality Assurance (QA). CQI is discussed as a system-wide philosophy and identify its key features: data-driven, inclusive, and holistic. Because CQI thrives in a learning culture, the five key components of a learning culture in the context of their

organization are identified. A discussion is held on the two main functions of the Quality Assurance Unit, internal to OCS: Administrative Reviews and Field Office Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs).

In the afternoon, workers are guided through an in-depth look at the Federal measures used to evaluate each State's Safety, Permanency, and Well-being outcomes of children and families. Using a systematic approach, each of the 18 CFSR items is discussed including: the item's purpose, what a reviewer looks for, examples from their casework, and Alaska's recent rating. Closing of the day is a brainstorm of ideas a worker may implement to promote compliance with each item.

Day 5:

Legal Day

The supervising Assistant Attorney General for the Child Protection Section spends the day with workers, reviewing and teaching Child In Need of Aid basics as well as the following topics:

- Review of CINA 101
- Standards and Burden of proof
- Removals & Placement
- .087 Hearings: a special type of placement removal hearing
- Odds & Ends:
 - Confidentiality/Discovery
 - Notices
 - Residual Rights/Psychotropic Meds
 - Family contact
- Evidence & Corroboration